

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Local Meeting Summary

Ellensburg Washington

September 23, 2014

Chairman Haley called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. at Ellensburg City Hall. Commissioners introduce themselves.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Tortorelli moved approval of the July 15 & 16, 2014 Olympia meeting summary and Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion. Commissioner Haley noted two edits to make before they are final. The summary was approved unanimously with the corrections.

Commissioner Tortorelli moved approval of the summary of the August 19, 2014 meeting summary with the California Transportation Commission. Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion. The summary was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Litt reported that the Retreat Team is recommending the Commission retain Allegra Calder from Berk Consulting to facilitate the Commission retreat on November 20. The Commission agreed to the recommendation

TRANSPORTATION 101 – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION IN WASHINGTON

Paul Parker, Deputy Director, WSTC provided a briefing on Transportation in Washington State.

[Transportation 101](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Commissioner Haley noted some corrections to make.

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Ellensburg City Councilman Bruce Tabb talked about the public transit system that the City of Ellensburg is developing. The transit system is building from the community's comprehensive plan. Operating since 2013, with city funds, student fees and a WSDOT grant, Central Transit is funded through June 2015. A Public Transportation Benefit Area was proposed and lost at the ballot in the 1990s.

Service between Yakima and Ellensburg also continues – at a reduced level and higher fares. The Yakima Ellensburg Commuter is a service provided by Yakima Transit, Central Washington University (CWU) and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), operated by Bellair Charters. The Yakima Ellensburg Commuter has weekday service, stopping at 7 bus stops between Ellensburg and Yakima. No local service when in Yakima or Ellensburg. Service provides 7 round-trips/day when CWU is in session and 6 round-trips/day schedule when CWU is not in session.

There are discussions toward developing a regional transportation system with connections north to Wenatchee and south to Yakima.

The City of Ellensburg street budget for 2014 is \$1.65 million. Sales tax contributes \$1 million; gas tax revenue is only \$251,800.

Ryan Lyyski, Ellensburg Public Works Director, talked about the Dolarway Road improvements project. Before the improvements, the road flooded. It cost \$6 million dollars, including a \$2.4 million TIB grant, \$1.4 million in federal STP grants, \$460,000 in distressed county sales and use tax grants, \$500,000 from local property assessments, and \$1.04 million from the City of Ellensburg. Additional improvements at US 97 and Dolarway are proposed for the future.

Commissioner Tortorelli asked if the City has measured and reported the economic benefits from the Dolarway investments.

Ellensburg has not created a Transportation Benefit District (TBD), but it has established transportation impact fees.

Brian Nash, Public Works foreman, City of Kittitas, read a letter from the Mayor of Kittitas. The letter thanks the TIB for its assistance in paving residential streets and thanks Kittitas County for its partnership with the City. Kittitas created a TBD in 2012, but has had difficulty collecting revenue from city residents because of address and mapping issues.

Commissioner Litt suggested that the Commission research this issue and communicate concerns directly to the Departments of Revenue and Licensing.

[Dolarway Road Improvements Project](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Commission staff will research the TBD collection issues and report back to the Commission.

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Commissioner O'Brien spoke to the importance of the Dolarway project for Kittitas County as well as the City of Ellensburg. It is an important connection for county infrastructure and activities.

Imposition of the initiative that limits property tax increases to 1% a year diminishes county resources every year. Also, GMA limitations on economic development outside of UGAs reduce counties' ability to generate sales tax revenue. Kittitas County is using distressed county funds -- from a .09 sales tax -- to help rural cities in the county, including paving in Kittitas and flood reduction in Roslyn. Some of the money helped to establish the regional park, which attracts sports tournaments.

Commissioner Haley asked if any road fund money has been diverted to other county operations. It was during the recession, said Commissioner O'Brien, but the funds were paid back and some road levy money is likely to be diverted in the future to improve water availability for future economic development.

Douglas D'Hondt, Kittitas County Engineer, illustrated how a repaving project happened on the Nelson Siding Road. Funded by the Rural Arterial Program (administered by the County Road

Administration Board), it includes an innovative polyester fabric laid over the hot asphalt in effort to reduce cracking.

Mr. D'Hondt also showed multiple photographs illustrating the impacts of fire and floods on county roads. He also showed several culvert projects before and after replacement. Kittitas County saves money and gets a better product by chip-sealing its own roads, rather than using a contractor.

[Kittitas County Pavement Wear](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

BIOFUELS AND ALTERNATIVE ENERGY FOR TRANSPORTATION

Professor Ralph Cavalieri, Associate Vice –President for Alternative Energy at WSU, talked about biofuels and alternative energy for transportation. Global population growth and rising standards of living are predicted to double energy consumption between 1990 and 2040.

The Energy Information Administration predicts no net change in transportation energy consumption by 2040, but a significant shift among modes, including less fuel consumption by light duty vehicles and more by heavy duty vehicles. It also projects slightly higher consumption by air, rail and marine transportation.

Newer vehicles will be consuming higher percentages of ethanol. Biofuels are predicted to double by 2040. Coal to liquids are projected to grow tenfold and gas to liquid is forecast to double.

Petroleum imports peaked around 2008. Two things happened: the economy declined and hydraulic fracturing increased domestic production.

Aviation growth will require new fuels that have lower environmental impact. Fuel is the largest operating cost of airlines. Commercial jet fuel consumption in WA is 525 million gallons a year. WSU and UW are developing alternative jet fuels for commercial aviation.

Biodiesel producers in Washington and production capacity:

- Imperium Renewables, 100 million gallons/year
- General Biodiesel, 10 million gallons/year
- Whole Energy Fuels, 2 million gallons/year
- Gen-X Energy Group, 15 million gallons/year

Partners in Sustainable Aviation Fuels Northwest include:

- Alaska Airlines
- Boeing
- Climate Solutions
- Ports of Portland and Seattle
- Spokane International Airport
- WSU

Alcohol (isobutanol) can be converted to jet fuel. It has been demonstrated in a test flight in A-10 thunderbolt by USAF. One ton of woody biomass will generate 42 gallons of biojet fuel. Capital costs

are \$500 million to \$1 billion, depending on capacity. A pulp mill could be a biofuel refinery; a basic premise of the project is the opportunity to repurpose closed pulp mills. The process by which soft wood is converted into pulp is very similar to that of breaking down cellulose into its components. Conversion to sugar will require new tanks. It could be fermented there or at another location. It can be done with the skills and workforce already in these communities.

The jetfuel is a high volume, low value commodity. Research is focused on other potential products that improve the return on investment.

WSU and partners are now three years into five year project. Years four and five: Deliver 1000 gallons of biojet fuel and stand up a supply chain.

Aviation Sustainability Center (ASCENT) is a partnership of 16 universities and other partners co-led by WSU and MIT.

Natural gas is cleaner than petroleum and coal. The price of natural gas in 2012 is 1/7 that of crude oil. How do we incorporate LNG into transportation?

There are vehicles available today. An in-depth study by EIA indicates that the rate of LNG adoption in railroads is highly uncertain. The reference projection is that LNG comprises 40% of railroad fuel by 2040. WSF appreciates that LNG could save significant money on ferry fuel.

[Biofuels and Alternative Energy for Transportation](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Note the challenges and opportunities for biofuels in the Annual Report.

NAMING US 2 AND US 97 INTERCHANGE “DON SENN MEMORIAL INTERCHANGE”

Paula Hammond, John Conrad, Doug MacDonald and Tom Robbins, Wenatchee Police Chief, all spoke in favor of the proposal to name the US 2 and US 97 Interchange the “Don Senn Memorial Interchange” in honor of the former Regional Administrator of the North Central Region.

Kevin and Jerry Senn, Diane Senn and granddaughter Alice expressed their appreciation for the Commission’s consideration of the naming.

Commissioner Litt moved that the US2 and US 97 be named the “Don Senn Memorial Interchange.” Commissioner Tortorelli seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

[Don Senn Memorial Interchange Naming](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Don Whitehouse, Administrator South Central Region, briefed the Commission on the Snoqualmie Pass improvements. The projects aim to improve safety, mobility of people and goods, and improve the environment. Phase 1, costing \$551 million, is partially complete with full completion by 2019. Portions of phase 2 are funded, including a new wildlife crossing.

Commissioner Obie O'Brien, Chair of QuadCo RTPO, emphasized the importance of regional coordination. Todd O'Brien characterized QuadCo as "in the middle of everything and in the middle of nowhere." Kittitas, Grant, Lincoln and Adams Counties comprise QuadCo. The regional population is 162,000. Quadco RTPO has 2% of the state population, 14% of the land mass and 21% of the road miles. The county roads in QuadCo are almost the same amount of road miles maintained statewide by WSDOT.

Every city and county has a vote on the QuadCo Council. The administrative responsibilities rotate among the four counties.

Heavy investments for I-90 distort the amount of state investment in the QuadCo region.

Quadco priorities:

- PRESERVATION: Keep our existing roads and bridges functional.
- SAFETY: Reduce accidents with safety improvements.
- FREIGHT AND GOODS: Improve the flow with all-weather roads.

Rick Becker, Lincoln County Engineer, said that the QuadCo counties use about 46% of their road budgets on maintenance and preservation. Douglas D'Hondt, Kittitas County Engineer, talked about the importance of safety. Fatality rate for county roads is a collision rate of 1.28 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, compared to the fatality rate for state highways of 0.58, and for city streets of 0.63. Improvements to two-lane county roads are needed to reduce the number of fatal collisions in Washington each year. The Washington State Association of Counties has published a report titled "Transportation Metrics." The highest fatality rates are on county roads, but dropping. Safety is the highest county priority. QuadCo recommends that safety funding be prioritized according to risk.

Freight and goods movement requires improving the flow of all-weather roads. None of the county roads and state secondary roads in QuadCo territory are in the WSDOT Freight Mobility Plan.

In Adams County, there was a levy shift during the 1990s, but no longer.

Have any of the counties considered a TBD to improve all-weather roads? Not in Adams County nor in Kittitas County. There is a lot of political capital required for a small return.

Commissioner O'Brien noted that although gas sales are high in Ellensburg, gas tax is distributed based on population not on gallons sold.

Commissioner Litt suggested that small, rural cities can benefit from TBDs for residential streets. It generates a very small amount of revenue compared to county needs.

[I-90 Snoqualmie Pass](#)
[QUADCO RTPO](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Highlight the rural road safety problem in the Annual Report.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH FOR SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT AND MOBILITY

Dr. David Darda, Professor of Biology at CWU, briefed the Commission on the wildlife research and partners working on the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass project. Environmental design is aimed to improve ecological connectivity between the north and south cascades.

The project includes:

- pre-construction monitoring
- post-construction monitoring
- high mobility species
- low mobility species, e.g., fish, amphibians and reptiles, small mammals

CWU has three main teams studying the wildlife connectivity:

- Fish team, headed by Dr. Paul James, has found Bull Trout in additional streams post-construction
- Amphibian Team, headed by Dr. Steve Wager, is using radiotracking
- Small mammal team, headed by Dr. Kristina Ernest, has found mammals in very high numbers close to I-90. Pikas already have begun to use new riprap and fill at Gold Creek.

Collaborative Research for Safety, Environment and Mobility

Action/Follow-Up: None.

AGRICULTURAL & FOREST TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Jon DeVaney, President of the Washington State Tree Fruit Association, represents the growers, packers and marketers of tree fruit in WA. Agriculture is a \$9.89 billion production in 2012.

Top crops: Apples (23% of state ag value), Apples account for 40,000 direct jobs and over 21,000 indirect jobs annually. Apple production has doubled since 1986 and grown 50% since 2001. The 2014 crop is estimated at 140,000,000 boxes, a 10% increase over the record 2012 crop. Ninety-seven percent of the crop is exported from the state. One-third goes overseas.

Apples and pears go to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma and are shipped to the far east. Cherries are flown to the far east. There is little flexibility to pass on higher transport costs to the end customer. About 2.5 million boxes of apples are shipped from central Washington a week.

Some fruit shippers use RailEx. Reliable rail service is a desirable alternative.

Rodney Van Orman, Anderson Hay and Grain (inc. 1960), reported that Anderson was the first company to ship timothy hay to Japan. Ninety percent of hay is exported to the far east and middle east. The hay from farms across central Washington is compressed in Ellensburg, loaded into containers, and then shipped to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma. Today, Anderson ships 14,000 - 15,000 containers a year. Very important to move two trips a day to the ports. Demand for forage is growing from China and the middle east.

Biggest concern is traffic control as people head east down the pass.

Commissioner Tortorelli commented that a lot of hay seems to accumulate on the roadside – this is hay being delivered to Anderson or in transit to local farms. Van Orman said that loads are not required to be covered.

Anderson also ships about 1/3 of its export volume through LA/Long Beach. There is more port capacity and lower shipping rates. It can ship hay grown in the SW from LA to China cheaper than hay from Moses Lake or Ellensburg.

Dale Mix, DNR, noted that DNR has 13,000 miles of roads. RCW 79.38 gives DNR authority to build and maintain roads for access to timber, agricultural and mineral resources. DNR roads connect to county roads and sometimes connect directly to state highways.

DNR forest road standards have narrow widths, crushed rock, gravel or even native surface. USFS has higher elevation holdings and private timberlands have lower elevation holdings. Sometimes the road systems intersect.

Fees from timber sales go into the road maintenance revolving fund. DNR has different accounts for firefighting and other uses.

There is public access for campgrounds and trailheads and for dispersed recreation. DNR has closed some areas due to maintenance budgets and wildlife protection. One of DNR's major initiatives is a 15-year fish passage restoration effort.

USFS is removing a lot less timber than DNR, so they have less money to maintain their road system.

[Forest Roads](#)

[Washington State Tree Fruit Association](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Include agricultural transportation facts and challenges in WTP 2035.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul W. Locke spoke about the need to borrow less and live with the money we have. He stressed the need to reduce ferry routes.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

ANNE E. HALEY, Chairman

JOE TORTORELLI, Vice-Chairman

ROY JENNINGS, Member

JERRY LITT, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

MARY RIVELAND, Member

CHARLES ROYER, Member

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL